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Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
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Right Honourable
Dr. John Sentamu

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Education Committee
House of Commons
7 Millbank
London
SW1P 3JA

28th February 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

YMCA England response to Education Committee inquiry into 16 Plus Care Options.

The YMCA is the largest provider of safe, supported accommodation for young people in England - providing just under 10,000 beds every night.

YMCAs across England offer a wide range of accommodation; from emergency beds through to supported longer term accommodation. Our philosophy of supporting young people holistically means that the YMCA provides not only a bed but also seeks to help a young person gain the training, skills and confidence to go on to lead independent lives.

Following the publication of the Education Select Committee's inquiry, the YMCA national body, YMCA England, carried out a consultation of the 114 YMCAs across England on what are the best options for 16 plus care. Their comments and feedback form the basis of the response.

1.0 The kinds of accommodation that are provided for young people aged 16 and 17 who are looked after by local authorities.

1.1 Predictably different local authorities provide different types of accommodation depending on their individual areas. Of these different types they will have a tendency to vary between a combination of supported housing, supported lodgings, private sector leasing and bed and breakfast accommodation. Likewise in some areas of the country YMCAs have seen local authority investment in both emergency and supported lodging accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.

1.2 The accommodation options provided for young people leaving care but still being looked after by the local authority – whilst being area specific – are at



best limited. From the YMCAs experience there appears to be a limited supply of transitional homes and for many local authorities it is the YMCA that provides this service.

- 1.3 The move from supported living to complete independence is a complicated transition which many young people struggle adjusting to. Accommodation which was designed for 16-18 year olds to aid this transition and act as a pre cursor to semi-independent living would be welcomed.

2.0 The suitability, safety and regulatory nature of alternative accommodation provided for young people who are aged 16 and 17 and looked after by local authorities.

- 2.1 The overall responses from YMCAs were one which reflected the patchwork nature of alternative accommodation provided by local authorities. There are some local authorities that provide a decent variety of accommodation which supports the needs of this group. However there are also some local authorities who provide inadequate levels of provision and in some cases this provision is wholly unsuitable.

- 2.2 There are examples of local authorities who have excellent children's homes up to the age of 16. However where some of the local authorities fall down is in the level of provision of move on accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds. This absence of accommodation results in many young people being moved outside of the local authority area in order to fulfil their statutory duty.

- 2.3 Due to a lack of purpose designed accommodation for this age group, many local authorities are left in a position where only bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds can be provided. Whilst this type of accommodation satisfies the local authority's statutory duty it generates added pressures. Bed and breakfast accommodation can be challenging to adequately monitor and supervise, and creates a situation where the young person is still vulnerable to exploitation from others who move into the accommodation.

- 2.4 Likewise the current use of independent accommodation with floating support is inappropriate for young people who have previously only lived in a collective children's home setting. The key for young people during these transitional years is that stability remains paramount. If this stability can be achieved, it makes the moves after 16 and 17 more likely to succeed.

3.0 Whether the Government's announcement to extend local authorities' duties to support young people wishing to stay with foster carers until the age of 21 should apply to those in residential children's homes.

- 3.1 YMCA is in favour of extending the Government's announcement to allow local authorities' duties to support young people wishing to stay with foster carers



until the age of 21 to those in residential children's homes.

- 3.2 The rationale behind this is that the new extension will allow young people in care to move to greater independence when they feel they are ready to do so. The YMCA often encounters young people who for a variety of reasons do not feel ready at that age to move on to semi-independent living. By extending the local authority's duty it allows for young people to have longer to adapt to this transition.
- 3.3 Alongside this a lot of the young people which YMCAs work with around this age group are unable to cope with what can sometimes be a complete break from the family environment and of an unplanned nature. As such moving them from a secure environment into one which can often mean isolation based on a pre-determined age limit is done so at the detriment of their personal and emotional development.
- 3.4 YMCA England is in favour of extending the local authorities' duties to support young people to stay on until 21 for children's homes however this does present some challenges for how these will operate in practice. The age gap between the youngest and eldest child will be extended by up to 3 years and the age gap between the eldest child and youngest worker will also decrease significantly.
- 3.5 The dynamics which the different age groups present may also cause complications for the practical implementation of this proposal. There is a completely different set of dynamics occurring when caring for 14 year olds and 19 year olds for example.
- 3.6 In order to mitigate this problem, establishing children's homes specifically for this age group may be required, but this would likely result in increased expenditure for the local authority. YMCA England would advise that a more suitable alternative under these circumstances would be for young people to move into semi-independent living through supported accommodation providers within the local authority area.

4.0 *Whether provision of alternative accommodation should be extended to the age of 21.*

- 4.1 YMCA England believes that the provision of alternative accommodation should be increased to the age of 21. As previously stated in relation to residential children's homes the YMCA believes that this new extension of the local authorities' duties will allow young people in care to move to greater independence when they feel they are ready.
- 4.2 The needs of young people are often the most acute at this age, particularly when displaced from their families. The support which YMCAs offer is critical to ensuring these young people are able to transition into semi-independent and independent living.



- 4.3 One concern which YMCA England has with the recent changes is that in an attempt to reduce expenditure local authorities operating within tight budgets may find it beneficial to move young people out of care and into supported accommodation before their 18th birthday. This would reduce their commitment to provide foster placements after 18. Whilst not suggesting that this would be taken up in practice by a local authority; extending the duty to cover those who access children's homes and/or alternative accommodation would mitigate this problem.

Yours faithfully,



Denise Hatton

YMCA England
Chief Executive

